

Brigham Young University  
Department of Theatre and Cinematic Arts  
presents



SEMMELWEISS

Written by Howard Sackler  
Guest Director Edwin Sherin

July 26, 27, 28, 31, August 1, 2, 3, 4, 7  
8, 9, 10, 11 in the  
Pardoe Drama Theatre  
Matinee August 6 4:30 p.m.



## Edwin Sherin, the Director

Mr. Sherin comes to BYU from the Hartman Theatre in Stamford, Connecticut, where he has been producing artistic director since 1980. He began his stage career in 1957 as an actor with John Houseman's troupe at the Phoenix Theatre in New York. Two years later, he directed his first play, John Millington Synge's *DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS*.

He became a director, Mr. Sherin said in a 1968 interview, to protect actors from directors who have no affinity or empathy for actors. In 1963 he directed *THE WALL* at Washington, D.C.'s famed Arena Stage; he remained there until 1969, staging eighteen productions. Subsequent Broadway directing assignments include Howard Sackler's Tony and Pulitzer Prize winner *THE GREAT WHITE HOPE* with James Earl Jones, *AN EVENING WITH RICHARD NIXON*, *6 RMS RIV VU*, *FIND YOUR WAY HOME*, *DO YOU TURN SOMERSAULTS?*, *OF MICE AND MEN*, *SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH*, *REX*, *ECCENTRICITIES OF A NIGHTINGALE*, *FIRST MONDAY IN OCTOBER*, and *GOODBYE FIDEL*.

Mr. Sherin has directed ten productions at the Kennedy Center, as well as works for the American Place Theatre, the New York and American Shakespeare Festivals, the American Conservatory Theatre, the Studio Arena Theatre, the New York City Opera, and the London West End. Additional credits include the films *VALDEZ IS COMING* with Burt Lancaster, *MY OLD MAN'S PLACE* with William DeVane and Michael Moriarty, and a television production of *KING LEAR*. Mr. Sherin is married to actress Jane Alexander, and is the father of four sons.



## Behind the Play . . .

K. Codell Carter  
BYU Department of Philosophy

By the late eighteenth century, free medical care was provided in large state hospitals throughout Europe. These hospitals also provided millions of subjects, living and dead, for medical students to learn and to practice their skills on. The hospitals included maternity clinics for hoards of poor women, most of them unmarried. In exchange for food, lodging, medical care, and the services of state foundling homes, the women were used for training obstetricians and midwives.

But the clinics had a sinister reputation. Often as many as three women were assigned to each four-foot-wide bed; women were sometimes issued soiled linen stained by earlier patients; many of the patients were diseased prostitutes; the air often reeked with emanations from nearby dissecting rooms and sewers. Worst of all, as many as thirty percent of the patients died shortly after delivery from childbed fever.

Doctors theorized about many possible causes of childbed fever: inadequate ventilation, improper diet, worry, even shame. Since the disease was most frequent in the maternity clinics and since most of the women who delivered there were unmarried, childbed fever was often regarded as direct divine retribution for promiscuity.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the world's largest maternity clinic was the Lying-in Division of the Vienna General Hospital. It was divided into two sections: the first, supervised by student obstetricians, and the second, by midwives. Judged by the standards of the day, the mortality rate in the Viennese clinic was favorable—it averaged about seven percent. However, the horrible and inexplicable fact was that five to six times as many women died in the section for obstetricians as in the section for midwives. Naturally, the poor women of Vienna dreaded the first section and tried desperately to avoid being admitted there.

This was the situation when Ignaz Phillip Semmelweiss was appointed as assistant physician in the maternity clinic on July 1, 1846, his twenty-eighth birthday. His brilliant insight that childbed fever was virtually ALWAYS caused by decaying organic matter and could be controlled by washing in liquid chlorine, an insight that was destined to revolutionize medical theory and practice, came in the second half of May, 1847. For further reading, see Morton Thompson's historical novel, *The Cry and the Covenant*, Doubleday and Company, 1947.

## About the Play

Robert A. Nelson  
Departmental Dramaturg

*SEMMELEWEISS*, the final major work of the late Howard Sackler, author of *THE GREAT WHITE HOPE*, examines the fate of the young Hungarian physician, Ignaz Phillip Semmelweiss (1818–65). During post-graduate studies at the Vienna General Hospital, Semmelweiss worked obsessively to discover why so many patients in the physicians' section of the maternity division died of puerpal sepsis, childbed fever, while hardly any died under the hands of the midwives.

Much of Semmelweiss' passionate search proceeded in the dissecting room, where he painstakingly examined corpse after corpse after corpse for some clue to the source of the fatal infection. Soon—the play compresses nineteen years into a dramatically intense fifteen months—he stumbled upon a terrifying, ironic truth. He, the physician who would give life, carried on his very hands the contagion he would destroy. He and his colleagues, who delved into cadavers during morning dissections, were poisoning their patients with their own contaminated hands during afternoon deliveries. The healer was literally a mass murderer.

The horrifying recognition of his major role in this dance macabre, the personal guilt he felt for killing countless mothers and infants, resulted in immeasurable anguish. Worst of all, like Cassandra of Greek myth who was condemned always to speak the truth but never to be believed, he was ignored or ridiculed by most of the medical community as long as he lived. Eventually he went mad, and was committed to an insane asylum. Within two weeks he was dead.

Producing *SEMMELEWEISS* is dangerous. First, it portrays birthing, suffering, dying—and in detailed intensity that risks alienating even a sophisticated 1984 audience. It also risks being misunderstood because of our historical perspective. Given our many decades of safely detached hindsight, we may myopically reduce the play to a conflict between visionary "good guys" (Semmelweiss and the few who believe him), and mere cardboard villains (the many others who irrationally reject what seems to us so self-evident). Finally, we may choose not to allow ourselves to experience the magnitude of Semmelweiss' blinding insight in its historical context.

*SEMMELEWEISS* raises disquieting questions about our relationship to truth. How thorough is our own search for truth? Can we possess more of the truth than we do? Would we risk all in the name of truth, as Semmelweiss does? Would we "stay out where the lightning can strike"? SHOULD we? How is our attitude toward truth affected by our opinion of the bringer of truth? What if he is a self-described "mediocrity who stumbled on the truth"? Or what if he does not seem to have what we consider to be the necessary credentials of a revealer of truth?

Sackler provides no easy answers, but rather requires us as individuals to choose—as it must always be. We can ignore what another claims to be the truth, reject it, or consider it, and finally perhaps embrace it. But each option comes only at great cost. "I leave it to you!" Semmelweiss cries as he throws his truth to the ground before us; "Do what you like with it!"



## SEMMELWEISS

Scene 1  
Admissions: Maternity ward of the Vienna Imperial Hospital  
Fall 1845

Scene 2  
The Morgue

Scene 3  
The Obstetrics Ward in Section 1

Scene 4  
Professor Rokitansky's Study

Scene 5  
Corridor outside Section 1

Scene 6  
The Obstetrics Lecture Room

Scene 7  
Ward G in Section 1

Scene 8  
The Botany Department in the hospital  
Winter 1846

Scene 9  
The Meeting Hall of the Faculty

Scene 10  
The Consultation Room in the Semmelweiss home

Scene 11  
The attic of the Semmelweiss home

Scene 12  
Professor Skoda's Office

Scene 13  
The Semmelweiss parlor

Scene 14  
A Lecture Room in the hospital

Scene 15  
Corridor outside Section 1

Scene 16  
The Botany Department

Scene 17  
The Dissecting Room

## Cast

Klein  
Head Midwife  
Semmelweiss  
Eva, Patient  
Julia  
Kolletschka, Helm  
Attendant, Kiwisch  
Niedermunn, Doctor, Patient  
Braun  
Chiari, Scanzoni  
Skoda  
Rosas  
Rokitansky  
Michaelis  
Hoffman, Hebra, Thorensen  
Princess, Sophie  
Erna Berghoff, Patient  
Tilli Krauss, Patient, Nurse  
Gerda Schumann, Patient  
Maria Baum, Patient  
Lizabet Slovic, Nurse  
Anna Hoffman, Patient  
Walda Mirsch, Nurse, Patient  
Altar Boy

Charles Metten  
Kay T. Hanson\*  
Bruce Newbold  
Kim Dunford Jensen  
Barta Heiner\* \*\*  
Charles W. Whitman\*  
Carl T. Bell  
James A. Van Leishout  
Larry Desmond  
Robert A. Nelson  
Charles Lynn Frost  
Ivan Crosland\*  
Lael J. Woodbury\*  
Peter M. Balogh  
Richard Bugg  
Rebecca Tingey  
Leslie Smith\*  
Ruth Razanas  
April Black  
Sona Partayan  
Melinda Wood\*  
Ruth Nickerson  
Ann MacMillan-Bosler\*  
Sean Jackson

## Production Staff

Artistic Director  
Scenic Designer  
Design Supervisor  
Lighting Designer  
Costume Designer  
Technical Director  
Assistant Director  
Costumer  
Assistant Costumer & Makeup  
Makeup Designer  
Resident Stage Manager  
Production Stage Manager  
Assistant Stage Managers  
Lighting Technician  
Scene Shop Foreman  
Scene Painters  
Properties Master  
Sound Track Producer  
Sound Technician  
Musicologist  
Vocalists

Pianists  
Stage Crew

Makeup Crew

Rehearsal Expediter  
Ticket Office Manager  
Assistant Ticket Office Manager  
House Manager  
Publicity Director  
Publicity Photographer

Edwin Sherin  
Robin Wagner  
Eric Fielding  
Eric Fielding  
Brad Loman  
O. Lee Walker  
Lisa Lynn Kirkwood\*  
Sandra Gray  
Janet Swenson  
Karl Wesson  
John H. Willey, Jr.\*  
Lori Gray  
Mike Thorstensen & Shauna Woody  
Lisa L. Wygant  
Kirk Lorimer  
Russell A. Saxton & Mark Gollaher  
Somsak Nonpoe  
Michael McDonough  
David Blaisdell  
Kurt Bestor  
Lynnette Owens, Rowena Greenwood,  
Anna Mooy & Andrea Evans  
John Frauzel & Irene Peery  
J. Scott Bronson, Steve Carico,  
Gail Palmer, Rick Rinaldi, Chris  
Utley, Traci Hainsworth, Kurt Hargan  
Cindy Garcia\*, Cheryl Brush\*, Susan  
Reyes\*, Greg Moon\*, Leslie Smith\*  
Michelle Jones  
Colleen Thatcher  
Debbie Wilson  
Brian Acton  
Wayne McKay  
Mark Philbrick

\*Members of Theta Alpha Phi

\*\*Appearance courtesy of



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Robert A. Nelson  
Departmental Dramaturg

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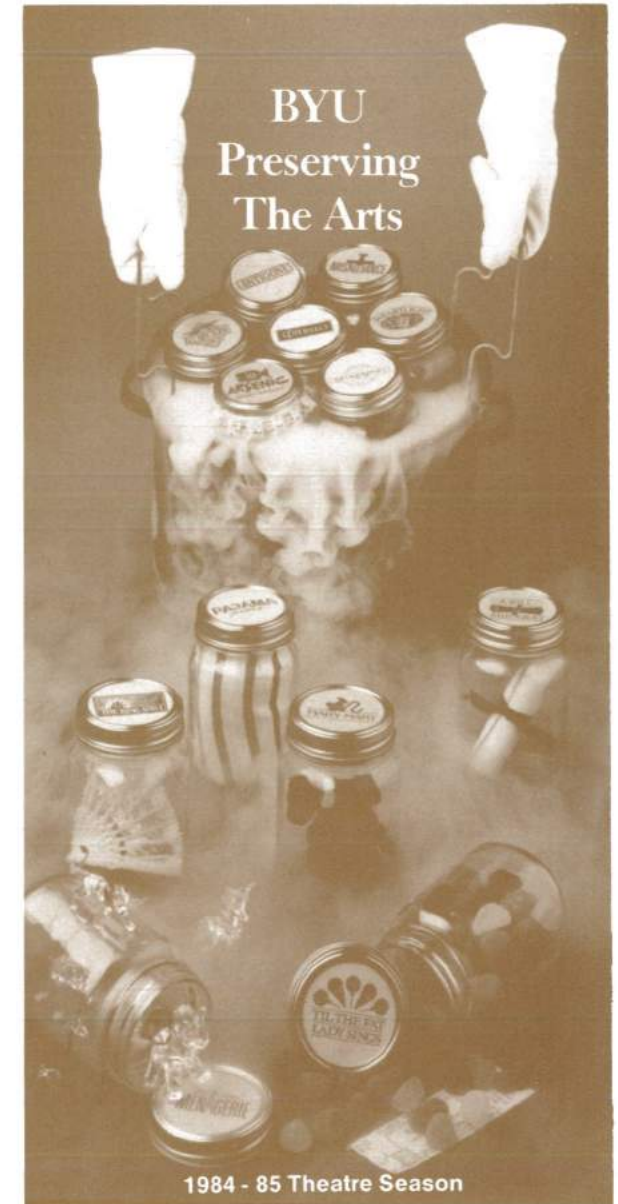
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